



Isomac Tea

A Closer Look



Overview

The Tea arrives well packed. Is very well built with high quality (industry standard) components and it is clear that a lot of care has been taken with assembly. Constructed using heavy gauge mirror finish stainless steel the Tea makes a considerable statement.

This type of machine internally, is slightly more complex than the cheaper single boiler non Heat Exchanger (HX) machines, but actually much simpler to operate in daily use. There are fewer controls and no need to do anything special (apart from filling the water tank occasionally) to draw steam, hot water or espresso at any time. The Tea automatically maintains the water level in the boiler as required and if run low on water in the tank the Tea switches itself off as a safety precaution.

The Tea is quiet in operation, mainly because of the good design and avoidance of metal parts touching that may cause vibration. The warmer tray is large and the machine is on the tall side, but there is still reasonable access under normal kitchen wall cupboards.

The Barista kit that is supplied free with the machine is good quality with all the essential items required to make great coffee. This kit represents excellent value and is usually an extra expense when buying an espresso machine.

The Tea is one of the flagship machines in the Isomac range and has been for some time. Choosing a machine at the top of the range is often a choice based on aesthetics and brand. These machines do everything you would expect and do it reasonably well

In summary; The Tea is an excellent machine both for the customer to use and the reseller to support. It will provide years of reliable service with the minimum of maintenance

How it arrived and unpacking

Very sturdy box, room on the inside to pack the basic free barista kit that will come with the machine, but not much more. It is not difficult to get the machine out of the box as there is a reasonable amount of room at the sides to reach down and get a good grip, but at 21 Kilos help is advisable.



The Tea comes with a manufacturer's manual that is of the usual poor standard common with these machines. It only covers the basics of machine operation and a very brief description of how to make coffee. The UK Bella Barista guide will prove to be of significant help to the novice user.



The corner positioning of Tea is ideal, especially when located near a sink. Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice and does not dominate on standard sized work surface, although it is a large machine. It is a tall but gives enough room under standard height kitchen cupboards for cups etc. Refilling the water tank can be done with a standard plastic cook's jug, without having to pull the machine from under the cupboards.

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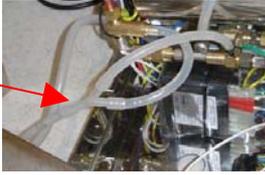
Inside the Tea

Internal build quality is good with very high quality components. Components are well positioned, neatly assembled. The water sensitive control board has been shrouded in a clear plastic protective housing well located to minimise chance of damage during filling the tank (as most people will not bother removing the tank for filling), or in the event of high pressure venting or a leak in the system.

In the event of any high pressure venting the Tea does have a nice feature where the high pressure vent is surrounded by a protective channel or gutter that routes the water down into the drip tray via a pipe.

Servicing this machine will be very easy; strip down is fast and simple with little potential for error. Component quality is (as you would expect very high), and the design excellent with easy access to internal components. The case is difficult to remove for the inexperienced home user and I would not recommend attempting this, as damage to the machine could result.

Key features

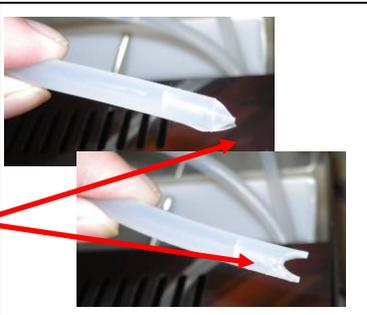
Item/Description	Picture	Comments
Machine runs hot, as do all HX machines, so you need a cooling flush.		At least 3-4 oz. The Tea being a moderate steamer, 1400W element and a boiler of 1.2 litre I there isn't much latitude for pressure adjustment
Boiler is 1.2 litres compared to the Vivi's 1.5l. It does take longer to recover and does not have the sheer capacity, stability of the Vivi		The boiler is as small as you would want to go on an HX machine. This means the Isomac would not be suited to light commercial use. Isomac would do well to source a larger boiler if ever they revise the design internally (but not at the expense of boiler quality).
The review Tea was running at average of 1.3 bar and had reasonably good pressure (and hence temperature) stability, you don't need to "surf the boiler" on these machines		User guide doesn't state what the correct pressure should be, no green ready zone markings on the gauge. I think 1.3 bar average pressure is fine & recommend that any Isomac checked should be adjusted if below 1.2 bar
Moderate steamer compared to Vivi and Zaffiro.		Fine for domestic use, not really suitable for commercial use
Plastic Y connector inside		I don't know why these are always fitted by manufacturers. Brass would be far better. We will be asking them to change this
Plastic clips on steam and hot water wands.		I thought I would like them, I didn't. They slide about look cheap and feel bad. The normal rubber type grips found on other coffee machines feel better than these

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<p>The water feed tubes are quite long and have square cut ends. While the in-line water filter is on, there is not a problem. When it was removed (as it will be when exhausted or 1 month old) The tube risks being “sucked” onto the bottom of the tank, obstructing the flow of water to the pump. There is a recommendation in the UK user guide to cut the tubes as shown.</p>		<p>Isomac should modify these tubes at the factory. They do make a small standoff strainer to fit on the bottom of the feed tube if your machine comes with this accessory , cutting the tube is not necessary</p>
<p>When low on water machine just switches off.</p>	<p>Isomac should fit a warning bleeper like the Vivi which starts beeping even though the machine switches off.</p> <p>Low water switch off level set conservatively (although personally I don't mind this I know customers find this irritating)</p>	
<p>Group/Brew pressure gauge as well as a boiler pressure gauge is a nice touch</p>	<p>Many machines use the cheaper option of a dual gauge, I liked the 2 separate gauges on the tea</p>	
<p>Nice quality steel case, definitely looked higher quality steel than Vivi and thicker gauge. Steel frame substantial and high quality</p>		
<p>Wiring all braided and high quality, just not routed neatly.</p>		
<p>Liked the way the control board was protected with a plastic sleeve</p>		
<p>Liked the drainage system around the pressure vent valve, a thoughtful touch, and will certainly reduce the chance of water damage</p>		
<p>All components very accessible. This makes servicing quick and easy (once the case is off)</p>		
<p>Very nicely made stainless steel boiler</p>		
<p>Steel braided high pressure pipe</p>		
<p>Pump replacement should be a straightforward job</p>	<p>Experienced technician approx 45m</p>	
<p>Portafilters coming ready assembled and spouts in the right place</p>	<p>How do they always get the spouts in the right place?</p>	
<p>The free water filter supplied with each machine</p>	<p>Nice touch (personally I think they may restrict flow)</p>	
<p>Lack of vibrating panels, makes the Tea a nice quiet machine to operate</p>	<p>My Isomac Zaffiro rattles when the pump is on, especially cup warming tray.</p>	
<p>Nice large cup warming tray</p>		<p>A piece of perforated non-slip matting works perfectly to stop the tray getting scratched. I would like to see the manufacturers supply something made for the machine</p>

Pressurestat Adjustment

The Tea was running hot. This is usual with HX machines, which are a tight compromise between continuously available steam, and production of brew water for espresso. The boiler runs at some 125c, so the group gets much hotter than on a single boiler machine running at around 98-102c (as much as 102 because there is some pressure in the boilers of these machines).

Most manufacturers feed the Faema E61 thermosyphon from the heat exchanger and take no special measures to ensure that the group does not get too hot. This means a cooling flush is required, prior to drawing espresso. The E61 group is actually quite well suited to single boiler non HX systems in comparison and hence it's wide use on these non HX machines as well.

This actually works in 2 ways.

1. The water flashing off to steam from the group removes some heat from the group (evaporation).
2. The main benefit is to remove the water that has been sitting in the heat exchanger (as it will be at around 125c)

The fresh water that would come through the HX after the cooling flush is heated by the HX in the boiler and probably further heated by the group.

*The Tea required a normal 3-4oz cooling flush **when running at 1.3bar (internal water temp of approx 125c).***

Final views on Pressure settings

As always a compromise, but the 1.3 bar pressure is probably optimum for the machine, any higher and brew water temperature will be too high. I measured it at 94-95 after a cooling flush, which is on the upper limit, but again this is common with the majority of HX machines. Steam performance is moderate, but is more than sufficient for domestic use.

Raising the pressure will result in brew water temperature problems, larger cooling flushes and I suspect, won't make much difference to steam performance.

Lowering the temp may reduce brew water temperature, but with the moderate steaming performance I wouldn't recommend it.

Please note that your machine will be thoroughly inspected by Bella Barista prior to delivery and they will already have ensured that the machine is operating correctly and boiler pressure adjusted if necessary.

Pressure adjustment can be done by the home user on some machines, but we recommend not attempting this on a Tea. Please give us a call first as it may be unnecessary.

Damage as result of incorrect adjustment will not be covered under warranty (please note correct temperature measurement of brew water is a skilled task, requiring experience and the correct equipment)

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Final Thoughts

It is one of Isomac's "flagship" machines and as such carries a unique pedigree. The Tea is a great machine, no doubt about it. It's not a cheap machine and at this level the look of the machine and "brand" name is as important as the quality.

My closer look picked up things I would like to see improved, but be assured this is an excellent quality machine that will provide years of reliable service and last a lifetime (if well maintained and carefully used). The quality of the internal components and the steel is top class and it has the name and looks together with the excellent Faema E61 group.

Espresso

As long as a cooling flush is performed, the Tea makes consistently good espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour. Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with this machine.

Steam Production

The Tea is a moderate steamer. The steam wand is well designed and the 2 holes are not too large. The milk swirls easily and the moderate steam performance actually helps with getting good quantities of microfoam before the milk overheats. You will have no problems producing copious amounts of microfoam at your first attempt.

Please note that although it is moderate strength steamer, it will produce almost limitless amounts of steam and wont "run out of puff"

Hot Water

It's nice to have plenty of really hot water on tap. The internal boiler has plenty of water available. Recovery time after drawing water is good. Drawing water for an Americano, the system recovers within 60 seconds.

The E61 group head is an industry standard (as are many of the components in the machine), so parts such as, pumps, gaskets, shower screens, filter holders, filter holder handles etc. are all a standard size and readily available from multiple suppliers. This also means that the pricing of these spares is highly competitive.

I had a different make of coffee maker many years ago, the gasket and shower screen for that much cheaper machine was more than 3 times the cost of the same components for the Tea!

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